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ABSTRACT

The three cultures referred to in the title are: the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences. The theme of the lecture is comparative librarianship. The comparisons are of public library services in different countries, how they are similar and how they differ. His emphasis is on British libraries with which he is most familiar. The beginning of the Sheffield Interchange Organization (SINTO) is recounted as the first library cooperation scheme in Britain. The establishment of the National Lending Library of Science and Technology (NLLST) and its success is described. A criticism of the Dainton Committee is that it has leaned heavily towards the needs of scientists and technologists and has not paid sufficient attention to the requirements of the social sciences and humanities. The public libraries, with the help of national, academic and special libraries, through the assistance of organized schemes of cooperation, and with the positive aid accorded by plans of subject specialization, can and must go on being instruments of education serving all branches of culture. (NH)

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Libraries And The Three Cultures

K. C. Harrison

Fifth Annual

C. C. WILLIAMSON MEMORIAL LECTURE

presented by

Peabody Library School

George Peabody College for Teachers
Nashville, Tennessee
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K. C. HARRISON

K. C. Harrison (M.B.E., F.L.A.) is the City Librarian of Westminster, the heart of the British capital. He is a member of the Council of the Library Association, a member of the National Book League Council and is on the Executive Committee of the National Central Library. Since 1964 he has been Chairman of the Joint Committee of Authors, Booksellers, Librarians and Publishers which has organized National Library Weeks in Britain.

Mr. Harrison is the editor of THE LIBRARY WORLD and the author of numerous books including LIBRARIES IN SCANDINAVIA, PUBLIC LIBRARIES TODAY, and the British Council's booklet LIBRARIES IN BRITAIN. Among his special interests are public relations for librarians, library architecture and staff training. He has lectured widely in such places as Berlin, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo, Reykjavik and Stockholm, and he is at present concluding a coast-to-coast lecture tour of the United States.

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It is peculiarly fitting that the officers of the Ingram Book Company of Nashville with whom Peabody Library School and its graduates have had such close and rewarding association, should endow this series to commemorate one who brought so much to Librarianship.

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LIBRARIES AND THE THREE CULTURES

By K. C. HARRISON

It is usual for those chosen to give annual lectures to begin by saying what an honor it is to be so selected. At first, I thought I would like to be different; yet an instant's reflection told me this was impossible, because for me it is a special privilege to give the annual Williamson Memorial Lecture. First, because I am the first British librarian to be so invited, and secondly, because I am the first public librarian to be accorded this honor.

When the invitation came to deliver this lecture, I was informed that ideally the topic should appeal to academics as well as librarians, so at first I toyed with the idea of a literary theme for—believe it or not—I think of myself as that rare bird—a librarian who reads! Still wrestling with a number of potential themes, I suddenly thought: "What would that great librarian and library educator Dr. Williamson advise me to choose?" And, as though he were present and talking to me, I felt he would say: "Speak from your own experience. You are a public librarian from another land. You are interested in comparative librarianship, and there is probably more to be learned from this field than from any other area of library studies. Obsessed as they are by their own problems, Americans will still be interested in yours and how you are endeavoring to solve them. Finally, as the administrator of a large metropolitan public library system, you are inexorably caught up in the overriding problem of the public librarian the world over—that of stretching a limited budget so that your libraries still fulfill the age-old concept of providing the right book for the right reader at the right time, despite the ever-widening literary explosion which is the bane of the librarian's life."

I wrestled no more. I had my theme. Public libraries and the three cultures. The three cultures?—I can hear you saying—why three? Why not the two cultures? Two were enough for C. P. Snow.

The number is deliberate. The third culture I have in mind over and above C. P. Snow's well-known pairing—the humanities and the sciences—is the field of the social sciences. Where do these fit in? It is true that a case can be made for them to be included in the sciences. But an equally valid argument can be made for the social sciences, or at least some of them, to be classified with the humanities. Much better, then, to regard them as a third culture, and this tendency is certainly apparent in Britain as far as library application is concerned.

Although my title is "Libraries and three cultures," and I shall certainly be talking later about libraries in the round, and not merely public libraries, you must excuse a public librarian if he dwells unduly upon his own type of library.

What is the purpose of a public library? Please don't worry—I am not going to bore you with attempted definitions, for there have been far too many essays in this direction already, on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. Yet some thought must be given to the question, if only to set the background. When we use the term "public library," are we all thinking of the same thing?

I doubt it. We speak glibly about the Anglo-American-Scandinavian concept of the

public library, and we sometimes proudly acclaim the fact that this concept has been exported through UNESCO and other agencies to many other countries—to the Netherlands and West Germany, to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies, to South America, to Japan and to the developing countries of Africa and Asia. Yet if we imagine for one moment that the public library service of any one country is exactly like its neighbors, we must think again.

For example, in Britain, a capitalist country, the public library service is free, no charges being made for the loan of books. Yet in Czechoslovakia, a communist country, readers pay charges for loans from public libraries, on the grounds that they appreciate more what they pay for. It seems not to be realized that this way they are paying twice! Mere readers of headlines, possessing only instant conceptions of the differences between capitalism and communism, might be excused for thinking that I have got these countries the wrong way round! Yet it is fact!

There are many more differences the world over. Most democratic countries now provide one general public library in each city, town or county. Not so in Holland and parts of West Germany, where separate Roman Catholic public libraries exist side by side with the general public libraries. This may be good religion, but it is bad economics! Again, in Denmark, public libraries reflect the nation's abolition of censorship by providing for their readers everything of literary warrant which is published. In the Republic of Ireland, on the other hand, religion still concerns itself with what the people may or may not read. Yet again, in Sweden and indeed most other countries, public libraries are open to all, of whatever race or color, but in South Africa the policy of apartheid has resulted in the establishment of separate public libraries for non-whites.

I am only quoting these examples to show the differences which have evolved since the public library idea spread outside America and Britain and Scandinavia.

Even within the confines of these countries there are variations. The five countries we group together as Scandinavia have marginal divergences in their idea of the public library, and between Britain and Scandinavia there is one vital difference which must be mentioned since it is germane to what follows. And it is this. In Britain we have always tried to make the public library all things to all men. Not only do we attempt to cover the whole range of human knowledge without fear or favor, but we take this a step further by not putting any limitations on the depth of coverage. Books of a highly specialized, postgraduate, research type are included in the stocks of public libraries. This policy, over the years, has resulted in the creation of many special collections, to which I refer later, and in the establishment of many large reference libraries, impressive in their depth.

In Scandinavia and some other West European countries, however, public libraries have grown up with the idea that they are popular libraries only, that they exist to satisfy the browsing general reader, and that they are not there to compete with the often older-established research libraries of national, university and college ranking.

So here we have just one more instance of a basic rift in public library philosophy between one country and another. But before I go any further, let me correct any impression I may have given that every British public library is a complete storehouse of the literature of all the arts and sciences, past and present. Of course they are not. Such an ideal can only be attempted by the great national libraries of the world—the Library

of Congress, the Lenin State Library, the British Museum Library, and a few others.

You may be asking why should a public library service attempt this coverage when there are great national, university and specialist research libraries in the nation's complex. Let me tell you a little more about British experience, and why we have endeavored to develop in this way.

My country is small, very small in comparison with yours. Only 93,000 square miles, yet 53 million people live in this area, with only a very few places in the Highlands of Scotland more than 500 miles from London. On the face of it, therefore, the British Museum Library, our national library, ought to be reasonably accessible to all. Yet a recent report pointed out that two-thirds of the readers using the national library were living in the London postal area, and that well over half the remainder came from the outer London area and southeast England.

It is true that the British Museum Library, like all national libraries, satisfies many requests through the media of the mail, telephone or Telex, but the hard fact remains that it is mainly used by those who reside within relatively easy reach of it. My guess is that this would also apply to most of the national libraries of the world, and to many of the great specialist research libraries too. And since British university and college libraries are normally open only to members of those institutions (although there has been a recent relaxation by some), you may begin to see why British public libraries have in the past had universal demands made upon them.

If public libraries in Britain are not like miniature national libraries—and they are not—how, you may ask, do they cope with these demands of universality? I have already hinted at the answer, or answers. First, they do it by not limiting the scope and depth of their collections in any other way than financial restrictions; secondly, by voluntary cooperation with each other and with libraries of all other types; thirdly, by the deliberate creation, under the umbrellas of cooperative schemes, of subject specialist collections.

Let me stress here that these developments are all of comparatively recent origin, certainly within the last fifty years, and really within the last twenty years. By tradition, British public libraries, like yours, were humanistically based. They were willed into being in the mid-nineteenth century, and fanned by an almost emotional belief that the future of mankind depended upon literacy and education. With so few people at that time fully educated, with others educated only up to the point of bare literacy, and with many still completely illiterate, it wasn't surprising that public libraries, as soon as they were set up, concentrated upon supplying those books which were regarded as the hallmarks of the library of the educated man. In the main this meant literature; it also meant history, biography, and, of course, plenty of theological and philosophical works, and books on music and the arts.

Technology as a written-about subject hardly existed in the mid-nineteenth century, but science did. Yet science as a subject was hardly represented on the shelves of the early public libraries. If you doubt me, glance at a few of the many printed catalogues issued by public libraries seventy or eighty years ago. After the inevitable Hugh Miller and Charles Darwin there were primers of physics, chemistry, biology—and very little else!

Even in the early 1930's, when I started my career in public librarianship, the situation was very little different in Britain and, though not a scientist myself, I remember

being frequently embarrassed by this state of affairs. Though I didn't realize it then, steps had already been taken to remedy the matter.

The first of these steps had been taken in 1915 when the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust published a report by Professor Adams which, *inter alia,* pointed out many of the glaring deficiencies in the public library service. In the following year, partly as a result of the Adams Report, an institution was started called the Central Library for Students, which later became known as the National Central Library or NCL. The chief *raison d'être* of this library was to attempt to plug the gaps in the public library service by providing books on loan to students throughout the country. That such a service was overdue, and that an appetite existed for advanced books on all subjects—these facts were proven by the gradual success and growth of the NCL.

In turn the NCL gave rise to the systems of cooperation which we in Britain call the regional library systems, and in eight short years, from the prototype in 1927, these organizations grew until by 1935 practically all the country was covered by one or another of them. There was one region for London, another for the North West, another for the East Midlands, and so on. Membership of the regional systems was voluntary, but most public library authorities saw from the outset the advantages of membership, and very few stayed out. What were left out, and this was one of the initial mistakes, were the academic and special libraries, though it must be said that forty years ago an atmosphere existed which would have made it difficult for these libraries to enter the schemes, or for the public libraries to have accepted them.

How much happier is the situation today! The regional library systems have welcomed into their folds all the academic and special libraries wishing to join. Very many have, and there is a new-found goodwill between librarians of all types to the mutual benefit of all, and certainly to the benefit of readers in Britain.

These regional library systems have done, and are still doing, good work. With one exception they formed union catalogues of their holdings, using these to locate copies for interlibrary loans. But though good work was done, it was not good enough. Union catalogues got behind-hand, and an 80 per cent success rate it was felt could be improved upon. So, after a few years' experience of regional library cooperation, the next development took place. This was the establishment of various local schemes of cooperation, and it was pressure from the fields of technology and industry which motivated the development.

It all began in Sheffield, a highly industrialized city, where the city librarian became acutely conscious of the fact that his public library service, with the best will in the world, just could not cope with the increasing literature and information demands of its technological readers. So he persuaded all the special libraries in his area to join the city library in a local scheme of cooperation which he christened the Sheffield Interchange Organization (SINTO). All the member libraries agreed to pool their resources of books, journals and information services.

The scheme was an instant success. When any of the member libraries received a request for a book or information which it could not itself supply, instead of this being the end of the matter, it was in fact the starting point of a chain of referral until the request was satisfied, usually from within the interchange organization, but from outside as well if necessary.

Observers outside Sheffield noted the plan's simplicity and success, and there followed two developments from it. First, similar schemes mushroomed throughout the country—in West London, in Liverpool, Hull and other cities, and in many counties such as Hertfordshire. It is worth noting that in almost every instance the initial impetus for setting up these schemes came from public librarians. The second effect of the Sheffield success was a realization that the regional systems, most of which you may remember had confined their initial membership to public libraries, would gain immeasurably if they admitted the academic, special and industrial libraries in their areas.

So there followed a deliberate campaign to recruit these into membership. Now, in the nine regions excluding Scotland, there are 247 academic and special libraries in membership, as well as 393 public libraries.

The next positive step forward was when the regional library systems, first one, then another, inaugurated the subject specialization schemes. Each member library within a region was allotted a subject or subjects, and it agreed to purchase and preserve everything published in Britain on its allocated topics. Where appropriate, subjects were allotted to those libraries already noted for their holdings of them, but another criterion was financial resources, every attempt being made to allot the most costly subject fields to those libraries which had the best means to cover them.

These regional subject specialization schemes were a post-war development. They have now been operating for more than twenty years, with the result that each main public library in Britain now has a comprehensive collection at least of British material published since 1950 on its allocated subjects. As an example, my own libraries at Westminister have assembled important and growing collections on music, the fine arts, medicine, education and the military sciences.

Public libraries in the British provinces all have similar collections, though the provincial regional library systems differ from that which has been operating in London because main subjects have been fragmented more than in the London allocation.

Up to this point, library cooperation in Britain was working—from the NCL, 75 per cent to 80 per cent of satisfied requests; from the regions, over 80 per cent of applications satisfied, and sometimes over 90 per cent. But the proportion of unsatisfied demands proved a constant worry to librarians—to say nothing of the suffering readers.

It became more and more obvious where the shortcomings were. Particularly these were in the areas of science and technology, and more specifically there was a noticeable inability to provide readers with access to foreign sources. To ameliorate this position, the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy in 1954 recommended the establishment of a National Lending Library of Science and Technology. This was eventually opened at Boston Spa, about 200 miles north of London, and it has been a signal success. In the year 1962 the NLLST, as we call it, received 117,000 requests, while by 1968 the number had jumped to 716,000. And it is satisfying over 91 per cent of these!

The very success of the NLLST led to many questions being asked about the coverage of other subjects. Why, some people queried, should we not have a National Lending Library for the Humanities to parallel the NLLST? The National Central Library, always poorly financed in comparison with the NLLST, saw itself as a potential NLLH. And what, some asked, about the third culture, the Social Sciences? Could there not also be a third National Lending Library, an NLLSS?

While these topics were in debate, another development took place concerning our national collection, the British Museum Library. Full up to overflowing, the BML was promised land for extension to the south of its present site in central London. Then,

by an unexplained *volte-face* of which only governments are capable, this promise was negatived, and the British Museum Library was handed a dilemma which seemed insoluble. But, to the everlasting glory of the British people, support for the national library came from all sides, and the Government relented to the extent of setting up a committee under Professor Dainton to look into all sides of the matter. And now government earned itself some credit by widening the terms of reference of the committee to include some of the questions I have just mentioned, as well as an examination of the functions and organization of the NCL, the NLLST and the Science Museum Library.

This really threw most of the country's libraries into the stockpot, as well as the whole framework of library cooperation in Britain. It must have been a great help to the Dainton Committee to have such wide terms of reference and a perusal of the Report shows that it made good use of them. Among its 132 recommendations it deals with the supply of scientific literature, the supply of literature for the humanities and the social sciences, interlibrary lending, reference and bibliographic facilities, library cooperation, research and training.

Some specific recommendations are that the British Museum Library should be constituted as the National Reference Library and sited in central London; that the books and eventually the union catalogues of the NCL be transferred to Boston Spa so that there would be one center to receive loan and photocopy requests for all material in every subject; that the present National Reference Library for Science and Invention be reconstituted as the Central Science and Patents Collection; that the principles governing the acquisitions policies of the BML for the arts and humanities be also applied to social science material; that the British Library of Political and Economic Science which serves the London School of Economics be brought more into the picture as a cooperating body with the BML; that a national bibliographic service be established, and so on.

You will want to know how the Dainton Report has been received in Britain. Initial reaction was good. It pleased the British Museum authorities because it supported the site they wanted, though they had reservations about the hiving-off of the National Reference Library of Science and Invention as a separate unit. At present it is part of the BML. The Report also pleased the Library Association which saw its own evidence largely mirrored in the findings. One place where it did not find much favor was the National Central Library, the stocks of which would be transferred to Boston Spa, site of the present NLLST. Neither did the Report please all public librarians, some of whom felt that insufficient credit had been given o the contributions made by public libraries in the supply of literature and information on all three cultures.

As time has gone by, it has been possible to take a harder look at the Dainton Committee's findings, and subsequent criticism has been rather more adverse. One basic recommendation was that there should be set up a National Libraries Authority, which would govern and at the same time coordinate future activities in the lending, reference, research and bibliographic fields. "A bureaucracy of books," wrote *The Times,* heading its leading article. Closer examination of the proposed administrative structure of British national libraries as envisaged by Dainton has brought forth many criticisms. Many think it can only operate in a cumbersome and slow way. I personally support the creation of a National Libraries Authority, though I fervently hope it will be a more streamlined organization than the one outlined on page 135 of the Report.

Another criticism which has been mounting in recent months is that the Committee has been much too cost-conscious, and also that its figures have not always been realistically based. Comparisons are made in the Report between the loan costs of the NLLST and those of the NCL, to the detriment of the latter, and one reviewer has pointed out that this comparison has ignored the costs and contributions made to interlibrary lending by the regional systems. The same reviewer goes on to say: "The movement to Boston Spa of the National Central Library will undoubtedly help the costings; it will not of necessity help the service."

Comparison is also made in the Report between the cost of storing books, journals and other materials at Boston Spa with similar costs in central London. These comparisons too should not necessarily be taken at their face value, as not all facets were taken into consideration. Much more statistical research would be needed to substantiate proper comparisons.

Finally, an overall feeling is growing up that the Dainton Committee, as well as being over cost-conscious, has leaned heavily towards the needs of scientists and technologists and has not paid sufficient attention to the requirements of the social sciences and the humanities.

So we are back where we started. The Dainton Committee, which on the face of it had a unique and perhaps non-recurring opportunity really to coordinate the provision of information on all three cultures, now seems actually to have widened existing breeches. I may be wrong. I hope I am. But this is the impression one increasingly gets from perusals of the Report itself, together with the Principal Documentary Evidence submitted to it.

This latter has just been published, and in an exhaustive and important Commentary on it, the *Times Literary Supplement* underlines the schism between the cultures which it claims is apparent throughout the Report. I quote from the Commentary:

> Now that the Evidence is available it can be seen that those writing on behalf of the humanities did not explain in full detail how such research is carried on in the libraries. Clearly they did not do this because they thought that to give such an explanation to a National Libraries Committee was unnecessary and would be otiose.

The *Times Literary Supplement* goes on to accuse the Dainton Committee of ignoring and sometimes even misunderstanding evidence presented to it.

> A perusal of the *Evidence* shows that the most eminent witnesses—including the British Academy and the Royal Society—support the concept of a unified, or at least, interdependent body of knowledge which it is the duty of libraries to organize, make available, and produce, and from which no part can be detached without some degree of damage to the whole.

The Commentary ends with this remark:

> If the Dainton Committee's viewpoint prevails clearly the humanities will find themselves placed permanently at the end of the queue, on the general principle that the humanities can wait (and don't complain), while the sciences can't (and do!).

I have quoted so extensively from the *Times Literary Supplement* to show that I am not alone in believing that the Dainton Report "looks at library use largely through the eyes of scientists." You may say that the attitude of this particular journal was predictable, on the grounds that its weekly audience is mainly comprised of those who are concerned with the humanities. I can only remark that similar sentiments have been expressed in other journals, not necessarily confined to humanistic studies.

If the Dainton Report emphasizes the rifts between the three cultures, my own attitude is diametrically opposite. As a public librarian, I believe with C. P. Snow that "it is dangerous to have cultures which can't or don't communicate." I believe that public libraries, with the help certainly of national, academic and special libraries, through the assistance of organized schemes of cooperation, and with the positive aid accorded by plans of subject specialization, can and must go on being instruments of education serving all branches of culture.

If they don't continue to develop in this way, if they pander too much towards the cultivation of popularity, if they limit their scope or depth in the belief that "there is a public library type of book," then the days of public libraries are numbered.

In Britain we are on the brink of initiating the University of the Air, or the Open University, as it is now called. Next year people will be able to enroll for degree courses, tuition for which will come through the media of TV, radio—and books! Books, I am happy to say, will be essential ingredients of these courses, so public libraries in Britain are on the threshold of an unparalleled opportunity to consolidate their position as essential props in the educational and cultural worlds. It could be their last opportunity, and they simply cannot afford to fail to respond to this challenge.

From all this you will have guessed that I am a life-long protagonist on behalf of public libraries. I consider they have many positive achievements behind them, for which they have received far too little credit. More than that, though, I believe they have a vitally important part to play in the future, not least of which is that they have the chance to act as bridges between the three cultures.

Of course, they already do this, but the supports have been getting rather rickety. All bridges need attention from time to time, foundations strengthened, carriageways widened. This is the sort of attention the public library movement now needs. A better public relations campaign to increase public awareness of their work, better financial support, and a widening of aims and objects. With such attention they can speedily be transformed into broad highways connecting all lines of thought and closing the gaps between the cultures so that all men can think with true wisdom.

Yes, I am unashamed of the past record of public libraries and fully confident that they have a vital part to play in the development of world education. And if that makes me sound rather like an election candidate, I am quite unrepentant.

One final thought. I see I have concluded this lecture without one single reference either to computers or to Marshall McLuhan. Is this a record?

DR. C. C. WILLIAMSON

The Peabody Library School is proud to present, in honor of the late Dr. Williamson, the Annual Lecture Series which bears his name.

Dr. Williamson's contribution to librarianship and library education has been widely recognized. Director and later Dean of the Columbia University School of Library Service from 1926 to 1943, he was author of the landmark study and report, TRAINING FOR LIBRARY SERVICE. His stimulus to the life of the library school and librarianship during his administration demonstrated that he was the right man, in the right place, at the right time. His death on January 11, 1965, brought to a close the career of a man of high standards, goals, and achievements.

Mrs. Williamson, in granting permission for the lectureship to bear her husband's name, wrote that although her husband may have been too modest to do so, ". . . underneath I know he would have been pleased . . . so personally I am happy that such a fine thing will have his name connected with it."